

FABULOUS CREATURES

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A Dictionary of Fabulous Beasts, by Richard Barber and Anne Richer, was first published in 1971. The Introduction states:

Hunting fabulous beasts has been an entertaining and often surprising occupation; the quarry we have pursued through poetry and fiction to its lair in mythology or heraldry has often made us smile at its antics. But before we smile, too, at the simplicity of the inventors of such fanciful creatures, it will be as well to look at something of the pedigrees of the beasts, and to see how, behind their monstrous shapes, they have a more serious face than we might expect.

The collection has been compiled from over five hundred different sources, and contains a large number of weird and wonderful creatures, many not listed in standard references. For your enjoyment, here are some examples, one for each letter of the alphabet.

Argopelter a hoary American beast that lived in hollow trees and never allowed itself to be seen. It passed its time throwing splinters and lumps of wood at unsuspecting passers-by,

Brollachan a shapeless thing found in tales of the Western Highlands of Scotland, responsible for many inexplicable occurrences.

Curupira a bald one-eyed Brazilian dwarf with huge ears and a hairy body, always seen riding on a pig. His feet were either turned backwards or were double.

Draconcopedes serpents with women's faces. One of these is supposed to have tempted Eve with the fatal apple in the Garden of Eden.

Enfield a heraldic creature with the head of a fox, the chest of a greyhound, the body of a lion, the legs and tail of a wolf and the talons of an eagle, forming a monstrous hound-like animal.

Fuath a malignant Scottish water spirit with webbed feet, yellow hair, a tail, mane, no nose and dressed in green.

Gillygaloo a bird that lived on hillsides and laid square eggs so that they wouldn't roll away. Lumberjacks in North America hard-boiled these eggs and used them for dice.

Hsiao a Chinese bird with an ape's body, a man's face and an animal's tail, its appearance foretelling a lengthy drought.

Ihuaivulu a seven-headed South American fire monster, said to inhabit volcanic areas and contribute to eruptions.

Jormungandr in Scandinavian legend, a serpent monster so vast that when Odin threw him into the ocean he encircled the earth.

Khubilgan any animal or bird which acted as the spirit-protector of a Siberian shaman or medicine-man.

Lumerpa an Asian bird that shone so brightly it absorbed its own shadow, and continued to give out light even after death.

Mauglmolach a spirit like a banshee that appeared only at Tullochgrim in Scotland, where it gave warning of the approaching death of members of the Clan Grant. (I hope I never meet one!)

Nesnas a one-eyed, one-legged, one-handed creature, like a human divided in half, found in southern Arabia.

Ovda a naked hairy spirit with feet turned backwards, who tickled travelers to death in the forests of the Volga region.

Papstesel a Tiber river monster with an ass's head on a woman's body, one arm an elephant's trunk, one leg of an eagle and the other of an ox, a bearded man's face on its back, and a serpent's head on its tail.

Qiqion a huge hairless dog feared by the Eskimos because when it approaches men or dogs they are seized with fits.

Raiden a Japanese demon with two claws on each foot and a drum on his back. In storms he jumped from tree to tree and preyed on men's navels.

Sasabonsam a tall hairy being with long legs and feet pointing both ways. It lurked in trees, hooking up passing Ashanti hunters with its feet.

Tripoderoo a small Californian animal with two telescopic legs and a kangaroo's tail. On seeing prey, it extended its legs and fired a pellet of clay from its mouth using its large snout to aim.

Urisk a shaggy satyr-like spirit who haunted deserted places in the Scottish Highlands, particularly waterfalls.

Vithafnir the golden cock who stood on top of the Scandinavian world-ash Yggdrasil, on guard against the evil enemies of the tree.

Wivre a poisonous wingless dragon which spread plagues. It would flee from a naked man, but attack anyone with clothes on.

Xanthos an immortal horse in Greek myth who drew the chariot given by Poseidon to Pelops.

Ysgithyrwyn a great boar pursued by Arthur in order to procure his tusk, so that the giant Ysbaddaden could shave with it before the wedding of his daughter Olwen to the hero Culhwch.

Ziphius a monstrous fish with an owl's head, horrible eyes, a wedge-shaped beak and a mouth like a huge pit.